

## The Problem with Taiwanese Orchids and Some Others

By Howard Ginsberg

Reading the title, the obvious assumption is that I have a problem with orchids from Taiwan. In fact, the opposite is true. I went to Taiwan for five consecutive years from 1994 to 1998. In order to converse with the people in Taiwan, I studied Mandarin for several years. I imported flasks and plants from Taiwan for many years and wrote several articles on Taiwanese breeding. So what is the problem with Taiwanese orchids?

The problem recently arose at judging when we were reviewing recent award slides. The slide on the screen was *Laeliocattleya* Purple Cascade 'Beauty of Perfume' (*C. Interglossa* × *Lc. Tokyo Magic*), which received a Highly Commended Certificate in Greensboro, North Carolina, on February 18, 2006, at a monthly judging. There was nothing wrong with the plant or with the award. The problem was with the name.

At home, I had a plant of *Lc. Purple Cascade* 'Shang Beauty' that I had purchased from Cal-Orchid in Santa Barbara, California. It was a Taiwanese mericlone as, I am sure, the 'Beauty of Perfume' clone is as well. Without DNA analysis, I cannot say for sure, but, having seen the flowers on my plant and viewing the slide, I was looking at something identical. On the Internet, one can find several clones of *Lc. Purple Cascade* other than those referred to above. 'Fragrance Princess', 'Shiang Beauty' and 'Fragrant Beauty' are three that I found easily. The pictures all had a remarkable similarity.

Was there an error in translation for 'Beauty of Perfume' and 'Fragrance Beauty'? Was it an error in transliteration for 'Shang Beauty' and 'Shiang Beauty'? Or was it poor handwriting on the label?

Years ago, I purchased a phalaenopsis mericlone from Taiwan. The plant came to me as *Doritaenopsis* Chia Lin 'TY' (*Dtps. James Hall* × *Phal. Johanna*). The plant received a Judge's Commendation and I chased around in order to find the correct clonal name that I eventually found was 'Tsuei You'. When I went to Taiwan, I began to understand. Mericlones are the mainstay of the Taiwanese orchid industry. Traveling from nursery to nursery, I saw thousands, probably hundreds of thousands, of mericlones and, usually, it was the same plants over and over again. In some nurseries, these plants had full clonal names completely spelled out. In some, they had initials. And, in some, they had no clonal names although they were the same mericlones I had seen in all the other nurseries.

What does this mean? Why should this concern AOS judges? Is there anything we can do? I first noticed a problem the second time that *Phal. Brother Dawn* was awarded. The same clone of *Phalaenopsis. Brother Dawn* 'C.Y.' (*Natasha* × *Misty Green*) has been awarded three times with different names — as the clone 'Cy', it received an HCC of 75 points in 1994; in March, 1995, at the Santa Barbara Orchid Show, this same clone, this time with the correct clonal name 'C.Y.', received an AM of 81 points; and, one month later, at an orchid show in Florida, the same plant, this time named 'CY' (no periods), received another AM of 81 points. There are two other quality awards to *Phalaenopsis Brother Dawn* (*Natasha* × *Misty Green*) with measurements and descriptions that are so close they quite possibly were given to the same plant.

However, if a person purchases a plant without a clonal name in good faith and does not know that it is a mericlone, and it then gets an award, what are we to do? What can we do? How will we know that it is the same plant? Orchid vendors are no longer limited to knowledgeable orchid people. In fact, we can say that orchid vendors are no longer limited to orchid people, knowledgeable or not.

There are many other questionable plants and they are not all from Taiwan. I know of one plant purchaser who received an award on a phalaenopsis mericlone that he purchased without a clonal name, not realizing that this plant was a mericlone and that it had already been awarded. I know of another commercial nursery that exhibited a plant purchased without a clonal name and received an AOS award. When I saw the slide of that award, I compared it to the award given to the named mericlone and they were virtually identical.

I do not believe either of the two people mentioned in the preceding paragraph are to blame. In fact, I do not believe that the onus can be put on purchasers to know what they are purchasing. They purchase plants that, for all intents and purposes, appear to be seedlings. The fact that the hybrids may have been made

years earlier and not remade will probably be unknown to the average (and even a knowledgeable) purchaser. The flowers look nice. Plants are purchased. Eventually they are shown. And they are awarded.

Originally, the Taiwanese were exporting enormous quantities of phalaenopsis. There were some seedlings, but they were mainly mericlones. (It turns out that phalaenopsis hybrid seedlings are now becoming as rare as the proverbial hen's teeth.) The Taiwanese have branched out and are now selling large quantities of cattleya mericlones. I am told that plants from Thailand have the same problems as those from Taiwan.

In October 2003 at an orchid show, an AOS judge saw some nice plants at a vendor's table. One was purchased. They were cattleya mericlones but were not identified as mericlones and had no clonal name. The next day, the plant received an AM of 81 points. I was told of this when I purchased a plant of the mericlone and put on the clonal name of the awarded mericlone. Was this correct?

Recently, at an orchid show, I saw a nice yellow candy-striped phalaenopsis with a label *Phalaenopsis Daniella Ter Loak*. I found the name on the internet with a photograph and it was the same plant. The RHS has no record of this name. Further research indicated that the plant probably originated with Hark in Europe. The plant was mericloned in Europe and, as with many European mericlones, a name representative of nothing, but good only for their records was given to the plant. The plant may have originated anywhere and its parents may be anything.

In a recent list of New Orchid Hybrids (July-September 2006), the registrar of orchid hybrids refers to a Trade Designation (Record of a Marketing Name) and goes on to explain what *Paphiopedilum Eine Kleina Nachtmusik* is in fact *Paph. First Touch (victoria-regina x sanderianum)*. We pay attention to registered names. Are we now supposed to pay attention to trade designations and try to find out what the hybrid in fact is? The fact that the RHS mentions it appears to give this trade designation a type of credibility. Do we now judge plants with "trade designations"?

At a recent judging a plant labeled *Laeliocattleya Netrasiri Waxy (Netrasiri Doll x C. Netrasiri Fireball)* was submitted for judging. No parents could be found. A Google search found many pictures of the plant and even seedlings with it listed as a parent. (Some listings attributed an Award of Merit to the plant.) But it was a parentless, unregistered wonder. What is one to do? (The name was in fact registered on August 15, 2006. A cultivar of the grex — the same plant? — was given an HCC of 79 points in Greensboro, North Carolina, on July 15, 2006.)

The world of orchids has undergone a radical change. Many of the people selling orchids, both on the wholesale and retail levels, know nothing about orchids. Even worse, they care nothing about them. Their loyalty is to the money this product brings in. Can anything be done?

No AOS judge can know everything. Is there anything that individual judges or the AOS can do? Is there anything that should be done? I sincerely believe that, in all the cases mentioned above, the exhibitors are blameless. This situation has been bothering me. It should be corrected.

However, I doubt that it can be.

I propose no answers.

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